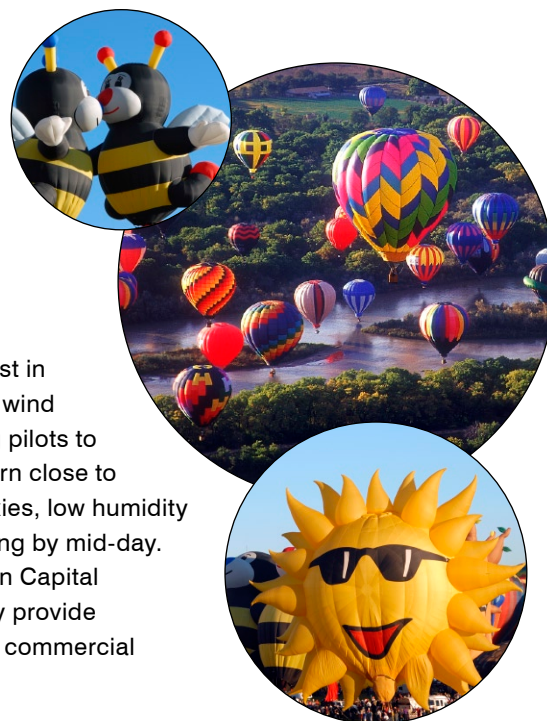


BALLOONING

“Hot Air Ballooning Capital of the World”

Clear blue skies, calm winds and mild temperatures are the norm in Albuquerque, encouraging year-round hot air ballooning and enabling more than 300 resident balloonists (more than any other state) to fly hot air balloons frequently and for long periods of time.

Why Albuquerque? The weather here is widely considered to be the best in the world for ballooning. In the famous “Albuquerque Box” pattern, the wind blows predictably north at one elevation and south at another, allowing pilots to launch, fly a great distance, then change altitude and backtrack to return close to the launch site. This unique pattern, created by the interplay of clear skies, low humidity and elevation, is common on early October mornings, usually dissipating by mid-day. Albuquerque’s ideal conditions have earned it the title of Hot Air Balloon Capital of the World. The outstanding weather and large ballooning community provide for ballooning year-round. Visitors can fly all year with a variety of local commercial ballooning companies.



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Bees and Sun ©Raymond Watt

ALBUQUERQUE INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA®

Each fall, pilots, crews and spectators from all over the world come to the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta®, the world’s largest hot air ballooning event. For nine days during the first full week of October, hundreds of colorful balloons float above the city each morning as dawn breaks over the Sandia Mountains. This magical hot air balloon festival is considered to be one of the most photographed events in the world, and draws a huge international crowd of professional balloonists and spectators alike.

Mass ascensions, when more than 600 balloons lift off, are held on all four weekend mornings and one day mid-week. Mass ascensions begin after the “dawn patrol” carefully examines the morning’s weather conditions. When the dawn patrol gives the green light, balloons from all over the world rise together in a harmonious lift-off. The sight of 600+ balloons in the sky is as breathtaking for first-time visitors as it continues to be for veteran Fiesta attendees.

The Balloon Glow® and other balloon illumination events are held in the evenings, filling the launch field with tethered balloons of every color, shape and size. As the propane burners inflate the balloons against a dark sky, they seem to flicker like giant psychedelic light bulbs. Special shapes balloons come alive during magical evening Balloon “Glowdeos”™. Dinosaurs, bumble bees, flowers, Mother Hubbard’s shoe, a space shuttle and a cow jumping over the moon can all be seen up close during a glowdeo, and they all launch together during their own mass ascensions, called “special shape rodeos.”

Balloon pilots particularly enjoy the competition of the Balloon Fiesta’s precision flying events. Every weekday morning pilots participate in competitions. In the key grab event, pilots must launch at least one mile away from the field, then fly back, avoiding collisions with hundreds of other balloons, and navigate to the precise location of an envelope attached to a tall pole. The envelope holds prizes, possibly including the keys to a new car, and the first one to grab it wins.

Gas ballooning is the ultimate challenge for balloonists: they fly higher and farther than hot air balloons, often exposing pilots to violent weather conditions. Each year, the Balloon Fiesta hosts the America's Challenge Gas Balloon Race, which began in 1995. This competition, based entirely on the distance traveled by a balloon, is the premier gas ballooning event in the United States. Over the years, Albuquerque has also hosted two gas balloon World Championships and four editions of the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett, the world's oldest and most prestigious gas balloon competition.

The most unusual and exciting feature of the Balloon Fiesta is that spectators are allowed to walk amongst the balloons as they inflate on the launch field each morning. Visitors are welcome to ask questions and meet the pilots--they may even be asked to help out a crew member with the inflation process! When it is time for a balloon to launch, "zebras" (the traffic directors dressed in black and white outfits) will clear a path in the crowd for each balloon to take off.

www.balloonfiesta.com



© Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum

Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum

The Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum is the world's premier facility dedicated to the art, culture, science, history, sport and spectacle of ballooning. The museum, which opened in 2005, features one of the world's finest collections of ballooning equipment and memorabilia. Set on the southern edge of Balloon Fiesta Park, the museum is a focal point in the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, but its scope is much broader.

Through innovative exhibits, the museum showcases the adventurous spirit, endeavors and achievements of individual balloonists, including several Albuquerque residents who continue to break records in the ballooning world. The museum is named after two Albuquerque pilots who were pioneers in long-distance helium balloon flight. Ben Abruzzo and Maxie Anderson were part of the crews who first successfully crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a balloon in 1978 and the Pacific Ocean in 1981.

While the Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum celebrates the accomplishments of several New Mexico balloonists, its scope is international, with a reach that encompasses noteworthy adventures and achievements spanning the history of ballooning. Since the first balloon flight in 1783, hot air and gas balloons have been used for adventure, scientific experiments, the arts, warfare, espionage and space exploration. This story is told throughout the museum in interactive exhibits, historic facts, multi-media presentations and changing exhibits.

(505) 768-6020 www.cabq.gov/balloon

BALLOONING HISTORY

More than a century ago in Albuquerque, “Professor” P.A. Van Tassell, a local bartender, piloted a “gas bag” from the center of town up to nearly 14,000 feet and landed, intact, a few miles away at the west end of the city. Still, ballooning remained an obscure sport for many years. It wasn’t until 1972 that 13 hot air balloons participated in the very first Balloon Fiesta. From that humble ascension, Albuquerque has become the prime destination for balloonists worldwide.

Citizens of Albuquerque have been behind many of the sport’s greatest achievements, including:

- The first successful crossing of the Atlantic by balloon was done by three Albuquerqueans: Ben Abruzzo, Maxie Anderson and Larry Newman made history in the Double Eagle II helium balloon in August 1978.
- Abruzzo and Anderson, with another Albuquerquean, Ron Clark and Rocky Aoki of Tokyo were first to cross the Pacific by helium balloon. The Double Eagle V flight set the record for the longest distance ever flown in a balloon: 5,768 miles, from Nagashima, Japan to a landing site near Covelo, CA.
- Anderson, his son Kris and Don Ida set another record in 1980 when they flew the Kitty Hawk in the first non-stop crossing of North America by gas balloon.
- Another Albuquerque hero, Troy Bradley, set 24 world records for duration, distance, and altitude including the absolute world duration record for manned balloon flight (144 hours 23 minutes).



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Ballooning Facts

- The first balloon passengers, in 1783, were a rooster, a sheep and a duck.
- A “champagne dunk” is part of the initiation rites following a balloon passenger’s first ride in a balloon, which often involves champagne being poured over the initiate’s head (Champagne was also taken along on the first manned balloon ride, to appease the inhabitants of the region where they might land.)
- Balloon rallies at hot air ballooning events are colorful, energetic social events where crowds of balloonists and spectators gather and celebrate life. In some ways, the atmosphere is similar to tailgate parties at football games.
- Balloon pins and trading cards are popular collectors’ items. Ideally, each balloon has its own pin and card.
- Sport ballooning has been practiced in Albuquerque ever since Sid Cutter brought in a balloon in 1971.
- Flying a balloon requires a pilot’s license, awarded by the FAA after extensive training.
- Balloons are called “aerostats” because they are static in the atmosphere. Rather than flying through the air (as an airplane does), balloons travel on the air. Direction is controlled by skilled control of altitude in order to reach wind currents going in the desired direction.

More ballooning information: www.itsatrip.org/balloon